United Nations A/HRC/34/46

General Assembly

Distr.: General
31 January 2017

Original: English

Human Rights Council
Thirty-fourth session
27 February-24 March 2017
Agenda items 3 and 5
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Human rights bodies and mechanisms

First session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law

Report of the Co-Chairs

Summary

In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 28/14, the first session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law was held in Geneva from 21 to 22 November 2016 with the theme "Widening the democratic space: the role of youth in public decision-making". The present report contains a summary of the discussions, conclusions and recommendations of the Forum.

GE.17-01412(E)

1701412

Please recycle

Contents

I. Introduction

II. Opening of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law

III. Creating an enabling environment for effective participation of youth in public decision-making

A. Discussion

B. Recommendations

IV. From formal to transformative participation of youth

A. Discussion

B. Recommendations

V. Participation of youth in sustainable development and human rights protection in specific contexts

A. Discussion

B. Recommendations

VI. Moving the global youth agenda forward: the role of youth in shaping the agenda of the United Nations and regional organizations

A. Discussion

B. Recommendations

VII. Concluding remarks

Page

3
3

5
5
7
8
8
11

12
12
14

15
15
17
18

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 28/14, the Human Rights Council decided to establish a forum on human rights, democracy and rule of law to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to the relationship between these areas and to identify and analyse best practices, challenges and opportunities for States in their efforts to secure respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

2. The first session of the Forum was held on 21 and 22 November 2016 in Geneva with the theme "Widening the democratic space: the role of youth in public decision-making".

3. In accordance with resolution 28/14, the President of the Human Rights Council appointed Daniiar Mukashev, Permanent Representative of Kyrgyzstan to the United Nations Office at Geneva, and Ahmad Alhendawi, Envoy of the Secretary General on Youth, as Co-Chairs.

4. At its first meeting, the agenda, as contained in the annotated provisional agenda (A/HRC/FD/2016/1) prepared under the guidance of the Co-Chairs with inputs from relevant stakeholders, was adopted. The present report was prepared by the Co-Chairs and contains a summary of the discussions at and the recommendations adopted by the Forum.

5. More than 600 participants attended the Forum, including representatives of Member States, United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, regional and intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations, including youth advocates and representatives of youth organizations from all regions. The final list of participants is available from www.ohchr.org/democracyforum.

II. Opening of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law

6. In his opening remarks, the President of the Human Rights Council noted that strengthening youth participation in public affairs should be a core objective for any society aspiring to build inclusive and democratic institutions that respected human rights. Noting the role of the Council in drawing international attention to the obstacles faced by young people around the world in the exercise of their right to meaningfully and effectively participate in public decision-making, he acknowledged that more must be done to mainstream the rights of young people in the work of human rights mechanisms, including the Council and its universal periodic review process. Citing the Secretary-General's statement on the occasion of the 2016 International Youth Day, the President recalled that the world's young people, who made up the largest generation of youth in history, could lead a global drive to break the patterns of the past and set the world on course to a more sustainable future. Furthermore, he called for the empowerment of young people to lead societies and contribute to finding solutions to the many challenges ahead.

7. The Deputy Secretary-General, in a video message, stated that all stakeholders should work not only for young people, but also with them. He stressed that respect for human rights, including the rights to non-discrimination, freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, and the rule of law were essential to the claims of younger generations. The adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security constituted a historic step towards recognizing the need for youth to take an active role in making and building peace. Widening the democratic space helped to promote socioeconomic opportunities for all and was essential to build accountable and

accessible institutions that functioned fairly and impartially. In that regard, he recalled the role of young people as key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including goal 16, to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all and effective, inclusive and accountable institutions at all levels, leaving no one behind.

8. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recalled that honest, effective, democratically operated and responsive Governments was one of the top priorities for today's younger generation. He stressed that a society that did not fully respect everyone's equal right to participate was fundamentally unsound. He emphasized the importance of the protection of fundamental rights, such as the right to freedom of opinion and expression, to ensure that State institutions were accountable and grounded in service to the people. He regretted that younger generations were not adequately represented in political institutions such as parliaments and in political parties and public administrations, thereby fuelling disenfranchisement and distrust in formal structures, electoral processes, leaders and policymakers. The High Commissioner stressed the need to help young people regain trust in formal structures and to remove barriers to their meaningful participation. He further called for concrete action in response to youth's concerns, and emphasized that the contribution of young people was vital to providing an adequate response to current challenges; they needed to stand up for others, be the voice for the common good, and act to support inclusion, equality and human dignity for years to come.

9. Mr. Alhendawi invited participants to reflect on how young people understood democracy today and why the most engaged generation in history was not given adequate access to politics and policymaking. Politicians tended not to prioritize the issues that mattered to youth, as young people were trapped in a vicious cycle of political marginalization; large proportions of the young did not vote, while the majority of people over the age of 65 did. That contributed to young people's withdrawal from a system that often did not represent them, leading to even greater levels of distrust, and even lower voter turnouts. Legal and other barriers faced by young people in running for public office represented a major obstacle to the promotion of youth participation, particularly in the political process. He urged that the narrative with regard to young people be changed to address youth "rights" rather than youth "issues"; that would address those concerns more accurately and acknowledge the related human rights obligations to be fulfilled by duty bearers. He also reflected on the recent advances made in the relevant normative framework, such as Human Rights Council resolution 32/1 on youth and human rights, Security Council resolution 2250 (2015), the importance of youth rights as a cross-cutting issue in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and youth-related commitments made in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. He expressed the hope that the Forum, the first United Nations meeting to focus on widening the democratic space by strengthening youth participation, would offer an opportunity for frank discussions and would result in concrete recommendations to support the international community in advancing young people's rights worldwide.

10. Mr. Mukashev emphasized that the skills, energy and ideals of young people were vital for strengthening democratic institutions and building inclusive societies without discrimination. He stressed the importance of protecting and respecting human rights and creating a conducive environment to allow youth to thrive and develop their potential, contribute to strengthening democratic institutions and build inclusive societies. He reminded government representatives of their role in mobilizing resources and ensuring that young people's issues received specific institutional attention, and welcomed the increase in recent years in the number of policies focusing on youth and the establishment of dedicated youth structures at the national level. Such policies and structures contributed to creating the conditions for increased participation of youth in public life, including in shaping the 2030 Agenda, and in the work of international organizations, including through

participation in Member States' delegations to the United Nations. Finally, Mr. Mukushev congratulated the members of the Human Rights Council on their decision to establish the Forum and stressed the importance of the recognition by the Council of the crucial role played by youth in widening the democratic space, protecting and promoting human rights and strengthening the rule of law.

III. Creating an enabling environment for the effective participation of youth in public decision-making

A. Discussion

11. The discussion on agenda item 2 was moderated by Romulo Dantas, Executive Secretary for Youth Empowerment of the World Young Men's Christian Association. The panellists were Sara Oviedo, member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child; Chaeli Mycroft, ability activist, founding member of KidsRights Youngsters and founder of the Chaeli Campaign; Gulalai Ismail, peace activist and founder of Aware Girls; and Dejan Bojanic, member of the board of the European Youth Forum. The discussions focused on the legal and institutional framework required to enable youth to contribute to the formulation of public policies and to hold policymakers accountable, and on the realization of all human rights without discrimination as a prerequisite to an enabling environment for the participation of youth in decision-making.

12. Ms. Oviedo noted the importance of an adequate legal framework, including at the international level, that specifically recognized youth as rights holders and ensured the promotion and protection of all civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights as a precondition for the participation of youth in public decision-making. She recalled the invaluable role played by youth for the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law in many countries. While acknowledging positive legislative developments in some countries, which had provided for a lower voting age, Ms. Oviedo noted the generalized lack of political will for the creation of mechanisms for the sustainable, effective and meaningful participation of youth in all decisions in which they had a direct interest. She stressed that such mechanisms contributed to ensuring that States complied with their human rights obligations, and ultimately to strengthening democracy and the rule of law. Ms. Oviedo also regretted that existing consultative mechanisms did not ensure that the views of youth were systematically and effectively taken into account in law- and policymaking as well as in accountability processes. She also emphasized the generalized need for more accurate research and data on the violations of human rights of youth as a necessary tool for assessing existing gaps in the effective implementation of their right to participate.

13. Ms. Mycroft discussed the importance of tackling disability as a cross-cutting issue rather than in isolation, particularly in the light of the systemic discrimination suffered by young people with disabilities in all spheres of life. Acknowledging and understanding the impact of discrimination on many young people with disabilities and their families represented a first, necessary step towards addressing the issue. She recalled that discrimination often stemmed from stigma and was grounded in false assumptions about the capability of youth with disabilities to contribute to public life, thus ignoring their potential to contribute to the community. She regretted the use of such negative terminology as "economic burden", "health hazards" and "social disempowerment". Education on disability and human rights played a critical role in addressing discrimination and eradicating stigma. She underlined the importance of eliminating all forms of discrimination and ensuring that all members of the society were given the opportunity to contribute and realize their potential. Finally, she stressed the need to strive for full

inclusion and to ensure that all voices were heard and considered when decisions were being made in order to maximize the participation of people with disabilities at all levels; that would represent a true understanding of democracy as well as recognition that every person had a unique and valuable contribution to make to society.

14. Ms. Ismail spoke about the importance of empowering young women to increase their access to decision-making processes and structures and ultimately to build more democratic, inclusive societies that respected the rule of law and human rights. The empowerment of young women was beneficial for the community as a whole because when young women were empowered, they were able to defend their rights, including the right to access information; that in turn fostered inclusive political and decision-making processes. Women's marginal role in society, including in decision-making, was the result of a number of structural barriers, including a systematic denial of socioeconomic opportunities and limited autonomy and decision-making power within patriarchal social systems, as well as restrictive social norms and gender stereotypes. Such structural barriers, combined with discrimination based on age, heavily restricted young women's right to participate in democratic decision-making. In that context, she shared her experience with Aware Girls in increasing young women's effective political participation by adopting a holistic approach that included wide-ranging capacity-building and mentoring programmes aimed at providing resources to initiatives led by young women and linking those initiatives to policymaking processes, political parties and decision makers. She also stressed the importance of engaging with communities and their leaders to bring about a shift in the norms and values that restricted women's access to decision-making.

15. Mr. Bojanic recalled that human rights were interdependent and interrelated and that the capacity of young people to participate in decision-making was largely dependent on the extent to which all their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights were realized. He stressed the importance of the right to free, equally accessible and quality education for the development of autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed young citizens. He recalled that Member States were the duty bearers for all human rights and therefore were responsible for the fulfilment of the right to education. Quality education for young people depended fully on how well Governments designed their education systems. Education curricula were often outdated or designed to meet market demands, while quality education had the potential to equip individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to exercise and defend their rights and responsibilities in society, as well as to internalize democratic values. Youth organizations offered an opportunity to foster active citizenship, including by bringing young people of different backgrounds together to work with and learn from each other. Participation was intrinsic to the culture of youth organizations that were youth-led and democratic. By engaging with them, young people were able to develop civic and political competences, thereby fostering a culture of active participation and responsibility from within.

16. In the ensuing discussion, participants recalled that youth were an essential resource for community development and positive social change. They called on States to abide by their legal obligations under international human rights law and to display strong political will to reduce exclusion and ensure accountability for the implementation of youth rights without discrimination, particularly for the most excluded and marginalized young people, such as women and girls, youth with disabilities, indigenous youth, youth belonging to minorities and migrant youth. Addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by youth in exercising their right to participate called for an integrated and comprehensive approach to the promotion and protection of the human rights of youth. In that regard, the right to inclusive, affordable and quality education and the empowerment of young people should lie at the heart of any efforts towards addressing those challenges.

17. Both panellists and participants repeatedly stated that there were gaps in the protection of the human rights of young people in all regions, who experienced violations of their rights merely because they were young. The enjoyment of economic and social rights and the right to information for the most marginalized youth were essential elements of political empowerment and the ability to take part in public decision-making.

18. Participants put particular emphasis on the importance of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as it represented a profound paradigm shift in the approach to disability whereby persons with disabilities, including youth, were not "objects" to be cared for, but rather "subjects" who enjoyed human rights on an equal basis with others, including the fundamental right to participate in public affairs.

19. The critical role of young human rights defenders in the promotion and protection of human rights and in advocating so that States complied with their obligations with regard to ensuring accountability for human rights violations was emphasized. In the face of a shrinking democratic space, participants referred to increasing reports of attacks directed at youths who stood up against human rights violations, and stressed the need for mechanisms to protect young human rights defenders and ensure accountability when their rights were violated.

20. Responding to some of the questions regarding how youth and youth organizations should strategically engage with other sectors of society, panellists noted that collaborative approaches were required to "deconstruct the dynamics of power" and to challenge the false assumptions around the lack of capability of youth to participate. In that regard, it was suggested that the youth movement had much to learn from the women's rights movement.

B. Recommendations

21. A gender-sensitive approach to the implementation of laws, programmes and measures relating to young people is imperative, given that at all levels of public decision-making, in virtually all countries, young women and girls may be exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that prevents them from the full, effective and equal enjoyment of the right to participate in public affairs.

22. States should promote the full realization of all human rights, in particular the rights to the freedoms of opinion and expression, association and peaceful assembly, as a prerequisite to the effective enjoyment by youth of the right to participate in public affairs.

23. States should adopt specific measures to ensure that young people participate without discrimination in the design, implementation and evaluation of any laws, regulations, policies, programmes or strategies affecting their rights. In this context, particular attention should be given to the direct participation of youth with disabilities in the drafting of laws and policies affecting their human rights, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

24. States should take all appropriate measures to ensure the full exercise by young women and girls of their right to participate in public affairs. To this end, they should implement empowerment programmes and remove structural barriers to the exercise by women and girls of their right to participation in formal and informal decision-making processes. This entails, inter alia, the adoption of measures promoting the engagement and collaboration of all relevant stakeholders, including grass-roots community and religious leaders, to bring about a shift in the norms and values that restrict women's access to decision-making processes. This also requires allocating adequate resources to initiatives led by young women.

25. States should create structures and adopt measures for the regular, effective and meaningful participation of youth in all established national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up on the implementation of State obligations under international human rights law.

26. Efforts to ensure full and effective participation of youth in public affairs should be combined with the promotion and protection of the right to equality and non-discrimination in national legislation, policies and practice. In this context, States should conduct more research and collect disaggregated data on the actual status of youth rights and their protection at the national level, with a view to exposing and assessing the extent of violations suffered by young people, including discrimination.

27. States should take all necessary measures to ensure the full realization of the rights of young human rights defenders, in particular their right to promote and strive for the protection and realization of human rights. They should take effective measures to protect young human rights defenders and youth organizations against any violence, threats, intimidation, discrimination, pressure, reprisals or any other arbitrary action, including abuses by non-State actors. States should exercise due diligence in preventing violations and abuses against women human rights defenders, who face particular risks, including gender-specific violations, and in combating impunity by ensuring that those responsible for violations and abuses, including gender-based threats and violence, are promptly brought to justice through impartial investigations.

28. States should ensure that all measures to protect the right to education and the regulatory framework for public and private education systems are grounded in the principles of equality and non-discrimination. In this regard, States should eliminate all legislative, physical, financial and cultural barriers preventing children and youth from accessing quality education, including by strengthening efforts to ensure that mainstream education systems become more inclusive of children with disabilities and by adopting effective programmes in the fields of teaching, education, culture and information, with a view to promoting an environment that values diversity and the right of all young people to participate in society.

29. States should include human rights and citizenship education, including media literacy, in the curricula at all levels of general and vocational education and training. States should ensure the effective participation of youth in the design of citizenship education and human rights curricula and in their regular review to ensure their relevance to the needs of young people. Concrete targets and benchmarks should be set for the evaluation of citizenship and human rights programmes to measure and increase their effectiveness.

30. States should provide teachers, trainers and youth leaders with the necessary initial and continuing training in citizenship education and human rights. States should also support non-governmental organizations, in particular youth organizations, including through adequate financial assistance, and recognize them as valuable partners in providing citizenship and human rights education.

IV. From formal to transformative participation of youth

A. Discussion

31. The discussion on agenda item 3 was moderated by Ian Power, Executive Director of SpunOut.ie, the youth information website of Ireland, and President of the National

Youth Council of Ireland. The panellists were Anne Lambelin, Senator in the Federal Parliament of Belgium and delegate at the Inter-Parliamentary Union Forum of Young Parliamentarians; Tomaž Deželan, Associate Professor of Political Science, Jean Monnet Chair for Citizenship Education and Vice-Dean for Quality Assurance and Development at the University of Ljubljana; Aya Chebbi, activist and blogger, and member of the Board of Directors of CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation; and Anshul Tewari, founder and editor-in-chief of YouthKiAwaaz.com and director of the board of the Indian organization Collectively. Discussions focused on ways to ensure that young people had access to formal institutions, including their representation in parliaments and political parties. Opportunities and challenges related to online activism and e-participation were also debated.

32. Ms. Lambelin discussed the role of youth in parliaments and its importance for strengthening the rule of law and building inclusive democracies. Increasing demands by young people to be included in decision-making came from the informal space, thus questioning the ability of formal institutions to receive and address those demands. Formal and informal mechanisms were complementary in increasing the participation of youth in public affairs. Ms. Lambelin provided statistics showing how few young people were members of parliament and the absence of bodies or committees dedicated to youth issues, and the level of disenchantment of youth with politics and political institutions. She shared her experience as a young female parliamentarian confronting the many barriers preventing young people, particularly women, from becoming parliamentarians, including sexism and discriminatory attitudes. Additional economic, social and cultural barriers, including lack of adequate financial means, contributed to fostering the exclusion of young people from formal politics and institutions. Ms. Lambelin praised initiatives by the Inter-Parliamentary Union to mobilize parliaments to encourage greater participation by young people in political life, including through the establishment of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians, an international youth-led body that brought together young parliamentarians from around the world to monitor and promote youth participation. Finally, she noted that, at a time when the number of young people in the world had never been larger, their representation was a real necessity to inspire confidence in and to preserve and strengthen democracies.

33. Mr. Deželan highlighted some of the challenges faced by contemporary democracies. He noted that when a large segment of the youth were absent from the political process, the preconditions of collective self-rule were threatened and the social contract broken. Democracies suffered when decisions were made for youth without proper representation, particularly when those decisions concerned the adoption of austerity measures, as they often impacted disproportionally on youth, who were in a situation of socioeconomic vulnerability. It was important to understand why youth did not participate or were not adequately represented in politics and democratic institutions as a necessary preliminary step towards developing strategies to reform political structures and make them more relevant to youth. To that end, he explained the differences between the following categories of youth: those who were apathetic towards public life; those who were uninformed, or not interested in politics because they believed they did not know enough about politics to engage; those who were distrustful of politicians and the political system; and those who felt disempowered, despite being well informed about politics, and felt that nothing would change through their participation. In that context, he identified two critical goals that had the potential to improve the legitimacy, political efficacy and performance of political institutions: the creation of enabling structures grounded in the principles of inclusion and non-discrimination, and the improvement of the capacity of young people to act independently and to make their own free and informed choices.

34. Ms. Chebbi shared the experience of Tunisian young people in the post-revolution era and the expectation of an emerging young generation that they could participate effectively in shaping democratic institutions and political processes. Democratic transition

brought with it both challenges and opportunities for the youth. She provided statistics showing the low levels of involvement of youth in politics and of trust in State institutions but also a higher level of trust in the military and in religious organizations, demonstrating that younger generations were seeking ways to engage and express themselves but avoiding doing so through institutionalized politics. In that context, Ms. Chebbi noted that there was a direct correlation between the unfulfilled expectations of youth in terms of participation in public affairs and their growing sense of disengagement from politics and distrust in democratic institutions, which in turn fuelled exclusion and more mistrust. Another challenge stemmed from the lack of an appropriate legal framework to support civil society's efforts to build young people's political and leadership skills. She regretted that in many countries, youth tended to be asked for their views and participation only with regard to issues related to sports and music. She referred to a number of opportunities for increased youth participation, such as the lowering of the minimum age requirement to stand in parliamentary and presidential elections in Tunisia and to the system of quotas to ensure youth representation in local elections. She also referred to the positive practice of engaging youth in election observation programmes, which had proven to be successful in preventing electoral violence and fostering youth engagement in the electoral process.

35. Mr. Tewari spoke about the diversity of Indian society, including in terms of gender, ethnicity, culture and religion, and underlined that such diversity also existed among the youth, who were expected to number 700 million by 2020. However, although young people were very closely interconnected and engaged, they were also "growing in a culture of silence", in which the two most influential systems — the media and politics — were heavily top-down and not designed for participation, and were taught not to question the norm. Mr. Tewari stressed that the Internet and information and communications technologies (ICTs) constituted unique platforms for youth engagement. However, the lack of inclusivity and of access to ICTs for most marginalized and excluded youth were two major challenges to participation. He expressed concern regarding the nature of the engagement taking place online, which included the dissemination of rampant sexism, discrimination, patriarchal ideologies and other challenges that had been passed on to young people by older generations. While the responsibility to address those challenges lay with young people, they were not given enough space in politics or the media. He stressed that every single decision made had an impact on young people, and called for moving beyond lip service and creating more online and offline platforms, including in the media and civil society, in order to engage young people and give them the opportunity to influence decision-making.

36. Participants discussed whether setting voluntary or compulsory quotas were a driving factor for promoting long-term, sustained inclusion of young people in political processes, or rather stigmatized them. Most participants were of the view that quotas had the potential to break the vicious cycle of young people's marginal role in politics and decision-making when they were supported by additional measures, such as legislation that aligned the minimum voting age with the minimum age of eligibility to run for office, automatic voter registration and limitations on electoral campaign expenses, to allow young people to compete on an equal basis.

37. Participants discussed the need to create and preserve structures that offered inclusive opportunities for youth to influence decision-making, drawing from existing positive experiences at the local, national and regional levels such as participatory budgeting, youth councils, youth parliaments and co-management systems. The role of traditional political parties was also emphasized in the context of young people who wished to enter politics, particularly youth belonging to the most excluded groups, including rural youth, who often did not enjoy equal access to online platforms or to self-representation in the media.

38. It was acknowledged that ICTs had the potential to improve political participation and transparency, including by connecting grass-roots activities to institutionalized politics through online monitoring and participation in parliamentary activities. However, reservations were expressed with regard to a disturbing trend towards the proliferation of inaccurate information available on social media, particularly in the so-called "post-truth" era when objective facts were less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief, and in situations where youth were "tech confident but not tech competent".

B. Recommendations

39. **To ensure greater participation of youth, States should consider adopting or amending national legislation to align the minimum voting age and the minimum age of eligibility to run for office.**

40. **States and electoral management bodies, as appropriate, should consider introducing quotas with the aim of increasing youth participation, with adequate gender balance in parliaments and other elective positions. When quotas are introduced, monitoring of compliance and implementation of sanctions for non-compliance should be envisaged.**

41. **States should establish or strengthen accessible and inclusive structures, such as local youth councils, youth parliaments or other consultative mechanisms, to foster youth participation in all institutions. Such mechanisms should be grounded in law, provided with an adequate budget and tasked with the formulation of recommendations that should be acted upon and followed up.**

42. **National authorities and regulatory bodies at all levels should collect data to track youth participation, representation and inclusion in political processes and institutions. This could be achieved by, inter alia, creating focal points within public institutions to collect and periodically publish data on youth participation, representation and influence (e.g., a youth index).**

43. **To ensure inclusive online participation, States should take measures to increase access to the Internet for marginalized and excluded youth, including through media education programmes. These programmes should address the technical fundamentals of the Internet and also explore how to harness youth engagement to foster dialogue with political authorities and participation in political processes via online platforms. Media education curricula should address issues related to combating hate speech, xenophobia, sexism and gender stereotypes, racism and any other form of intolerance.**

44. **As community media fulfil an important democratic role and contribute to empowerment and media pluralism, States should provide an enabling legal environment and financial support to youth-led media with a view to promoting the right of youth to freedom of expression and participation, strengthening connections between youth, civil society organizations and policymakers and raising awareness of youth issues, particularly those affecting the most excluded youth.**

45. **States should introduce mechanisms to promote an intergenerational dialogue within existing policymaking structures. The promotion of inclusive and safe spaces for informal dialogue across generations should also be encouraged.**

V. Participation of youth in sustainable development and human rights protection in specific contexts

A. Discussion

46. The moderator of the panel on agenda item 4 was Francine Muyumba, President of the Pan African Youth Union. The panellists were Ana Saldarriaga, member of the Supervisory Board of AIESEC; Scott Atran, anthropologist at the National Center for Scientific Research of France, Oxford University and the University of Michigan; Hajer Sharief, co-founder of Maan Nabniha (Together We Build It) and member of the advisory group of experts for the Secretary-General's progress study on youth, peace and security, mandated by the Security Council in resolution 2250 (2015); and Martine Kessy Ekomo-Soignet, founder of URU (Take off) and member of the advisory group of experts for the Secretary-General's progress study. Discussions focused on the role of youth in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and in strategies for the resolution of conflicts, peacebuilding efforts and the prevention of violent extremism.

47. Ms. Saldarriaga recommended that young people not be seen as an "issue" that needed to be addressed in each of the Sustainable Development Goals, but rather as protagonists and partners in making the Goals a reality. That perspective would help challenge biased attitudes towards the role of youth and open channels for youth participation in the implementation of the Goals. Ms. Saldarriaga identified three main roles for youth: to raise awareness among young people about the Sustainable Development Goals and their potential impact on their lives; to engage with local and national governmental structures and hold them accountable for implementing the Goals; and to act as role models and become influential leaders. She explained some of the challenges and barriers encountered in strengthening the role of youth in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as the lack of transparent, accessible and inclusive implementation plans and the lack of official channels for youth participation in measuring progress. Gender inequality and discrimination against women were among the main obstacles hindering young women's chances to become influential leaders and drivers for change. She proposed innovative ways to overcome those barriers that would involve traditional and social media, both the public and the private sector and academia. As a preliminary step, it was important to understand young people's needs and to take into account differences in cultures and education levels among youth, so as to leave no one behind.

48. Mr. Atran noted that human rights, democracy and equality before the law had not been commonplace notions for most of human history and across cultures, and that those principles had been and would continue to be made to prevail only through costly battles. He pointed out that youth had an important role to play in keeping those principles alive and to ensure that radical Islam and xenophobic ethno-nationalism did not tear apart the social and political fabrics. Yet, youth were becoming increasingly marginalized from engagement with the political structure. With regard to the jihadi movement, he expressed the view that perhaps never before in history had so few, with such meagre means, caused such fear in so many, dominating global political discourse like no other subject since the Second World War. He discussed the increasing involvement of women, especially young girls, in facilitating social connections within that movement without being directly involved in the violence or logistical support. To counter the movement's ideology, rather than focusing on counter-narratives with negative mass messaging, he advocated engagement with real people and actual places. He cited as an example social development projects initiated by young people, in consultation with local sheikhs, that had proven to be successful in turning youth away from violence and fostering feelings of self-worth. He

also stressed the need to involve women and young people in all peace negotiations, and warned against transforming youth into "just another advocacy group within the neo-liberal framework of identity politics".

49. Ms. Sharief referred to her experience of a society that had turned to violence. She stressed the importance of the international community's support in such environments and highlighted the impact of such support on power structures on the ground. She invited participants to reflect on some questions to be asked when such support was provided: who were the recipients of international support? Who was entitled to take part in peace negotiations? Who was recognized as an important player on the ground and whose security was prioritized? Ms. Sharief welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) and explained that, although the Council explicitly asked for the inclusion of youth in peacebuilding processes, the question remained how to make the resolution relevant to local communities. Drawing from her experience, including with the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security in Libya, she explained that one of the main challenges in translating such resolutions into reality at the local level was that they were difficult for local communities to understand. What was needed was to explain the world to the United Nations, not to explain the United Nations to the world. Ms. Sharief also referred to a friend who had been killed by an armed group in Libya because of his work in defending youth human rights, and asked participants to join her in paying tribute to the human rights defender by standing up and promising never to remain silent and to speak up for human rights.

50. Ms. Ekomo-Soignet offered some insights into the situation of youth participation in the peace process in the Central African Republic. She stressed that the notion of human rights did not necessarily resonate with young people, who sought specific and tangible solutions for difficulties in their daily lives and were often not familiar with human rights instruments. Small initiatives had the potential to inspire other young people to engage and sensitize their communities, local leaders and international actors to seek practical and durable solutions. She regretted the focus on sensational stories and recommended adopting a bottom-up approach to making human rights more relevant. She provided an example from the largest internally displaced person camp in her country, where young people succeeded in regaining freedom of movement where international organizations had failed, simply because youth belonging to the Muslim community and Christian youth wanted to play football together. She explained how social cohesion had been restored, and that Christian children were able to return safely to schools close to the Muslim neighbourhood and women to the local market, thereby having a concrete impact on their human rights. She asked young leaders to mobilize and work with the 75 per cent of young people in the Central African Republic who were currently affected by armed conflict and to think of actions that could have a real impact at the local level. Turning to the participation of youth in peace negotiations and peace processes, she regretted the lack of structured and systematic participation by young people, particularly those most marginalized and living in rural areas, in peace initiatives at all levels.

51. Participants discussed the importance of youth taking the Sustainable Development Goals to the grass-roots level and translating them into concrete achievements. In that regard, participants provided examples of successful activities that might be replicated in various country situations, including partnering with the business sector, to champion the implementation of the Goals. The importance for youth organizations to assess the convergence of the Sustainable Development Goal targets with existing State initiatives, policies and programmes and to secure the Government's support for the implementation of youth-led projects, including those aimed at ensuring that youth needs and expectations were effectively met, was also emphasized.

52. Participants highlighted the potential of the Sustainable Development Goals to provide young people with concrete means to improve their lives, which in turn could contribute to countering the appeal of violent extremist groups. Factors that pushed young people to join extremist movements were discussed, including the assumption that socioeconomic marginalization was the exclusive driver for radicalization, disregarding the importance of the aspiration to feel empowered and part of a community that some youth sought by joining extremist groups.

53. Participants identified some of the major challenges that hampered youth participation in peacebuilding and peace negotiation processes, including the lack of recognition of the positive role youth could play in implementing the peace and security agenda. Such an approach was often based on narratives that described youth either as the people most likely to be violent and receptive to appeals to take up arms and violent extremism, or as mere victims of conflicts. Consequently, youth were consulted only sporadically, most often through ad hoc meetings. Participants also recognized the difficulties that youth, particularly marginalized youth, faced in securing funds to cover their participation in multi-stakeholder conferences and forums where peace and security issues were discussed and important decisions made.

54. Participants also discussed possible synergies between Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015) and 1325 (2000) and the lessons learned from the latter, particularly with regard to effective initiatives to translate abstract concepts such as peace and security into local reality.

B. Recommendations

55. **States should ensure that young people are encouraged to develop a sense of opportunity and ownership in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals and are engaged in their implementation. This can be achieved, for example, by raising awareness about the 17 Goals and their relevance to local needs through campaigns and other creative approaches, particularly in remote areas and among marginalized young people. In this context, States should provide safe spaces for youth to express their concerns, needs and priorities in relation to the implementation of the Goals. They should also work with youth to ensure that implementation plans take local needs into account.**

56. **Traditional media should disseminate information to help youth, particularly youth with no access to the Internet, understand the Sustainable Development Goals and their potentially transformative impact at the local level. The media should support accountability initiatives and mechanisms, including by disseminating information on actions undertaken by the authorities, their shortcomings and achievements in the implementation of the Goals. Moreover, the media should contribute to fostering a dialogue between Governments and young people, including by providing youth with the opportunity to express their views and to influence decision makers.**

57. **States should allocate adequate political, technical and financial support to ensure that Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) is relevant to local communities, that the resolution is implemented and that it gives rise to concrete peace and security programmes and policies. Such programmes and policies should be designed, implemented and monitored with the full, effective and meaningful participation of youth organizations and youth from local communities. States should commit to provide adequate financial support to such organizations and work with them to ensure their participation in efforts towards the implementation of the peace and**

security agenda, including raising awareness on resolution 2250 (2015) and its potentially beneficial impact at the local level.

58. **States should establish mechanisms for the sustainable, effective and meaningful participation of youth in peace negotiations, peacebuilding and transitional justice initiatives and processes. Special attention should be given to groups that are often disproportionately affected by conflict, such as young people with disabilities, internally displaced youth and refugees and young women and girls, to ensure their participation in peace negotiations and peacebuilding initiatives, including by creating safe spaces to raise their specific concerns.**

59. **Youth-led initiatives that have proven to contribute to peacebuilding should be recognized, promoted and supported. The media should promote the positive role of young people in peace-related initiatives, as well as disseminate successful stories of youth-led initiatives at the local level.**

60. **Responding to the multifaceted drivers and conditions contributing to the emergence of violent extremism requires comprehensive and sustained participation of young people at all levels of decision-making. Any measures and programmes to prevent violent extremism should comply with human rights norms and standards and include a major focus on strengthening the local and endogenous capacities of youth for preventing violent extremism and on supporting the resilience of communities to threats of violent extremism, including through mutual support and community-based mentorships.**

61. **States should develop violence-prevention strategies that are in full compliance with their human rights obligations and that go beyond simple security responses, for example, by ensuring that youth have the opportunity to contribute to the development of their communities. Attention should be paid to ensuring that such measures neither discriminate against nor stigmatize particular groups or communities.**

VI. Moving the global youth agenda forward: the role of youth in shaping the agenda of the United Nations and regional organizations

A. Discussion

62. The moderator of the panel on agenda item 5 was Mr. Alhendawi. The panellists were Max Trejo Cervantes, Secretary-General of the Ibero-American Youth Organization; Alexander Kauschanski, former youth delegate to the United Nations from Germany and member of the World Federation of United Nations Associations; and Rita Muyambo, Head of Programmes for the World Young Women's Christian Association. Discussions related to measures to ensure the participation of young people in the work of the United Nations and regional organizations, including possible avenues for young people to bring allegations of human rights violations before international and regional human rights mechanisms, and ways to ensure that issues relevant to youth were considered by those mechanisms.

63. Mr. Trejo Cervantes described the activities of the Ibero-American Youth Organization and its mandate to provide a platform for working towards ensuring the human rights of millions of young people living in the region, and outlined the organization's achievements. Among the initiatives it had promoted were the Ibero-American Pact for Youth and the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth and

its additional protocol. He explained that the Pact had been developed with young people, including Afrodescendants, indigenous people and representatives of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, through a participatory, inclusive and bottom-up approach and taking into consideration young people's expectations and diverse experiences. The Pact provided a legal and programmatic framework for the development of concrete actions and tangible initiatives developed by and with young people in 21 States. It was complemented by a plan of action for the effective implementation of youth rights through a holistic and comprehensive approach in which participation featured as a cross-cutting right. The guarantee of youth participation as a right was also made explicit in the updated Ibero-American Convention and its additional protocol, international legally binding instruments dedicated to the promotion and protection of the rights of young people. He concluded by recalling that young people were strategic stakeholders, economic players and agents of social change, and noted that the positive developments in the field of youth participation had shown that youth participation was no longer an idea, but a fact. Mr. Trejo Cervantes urged relevant stakeholders not to limit their efforts to merely listening to the voices of youth but rather to act upon them.

64. Mr. Kauschanski shared his experiences as a young person participating in decision-making at the international level. He explained that the role of youth delegates was to strengthen linkages between civil society and the United Nations. At the international level, for example, that translated into the responsibility to draw attention to youth concerns and ideas when important resolutions were negotiated and adopted, as well as to advocate for more youth representation in international decision-making forums. At the national level, youth delegates, through their access to politicians, could contribute to making the priorities of the international community a political reality. They raised awareness among young people about the United Nations, shared ideas and empowered youth to engage with political processes. Despite the recommendations made since 1981 to Member States to include youth in their delegations, only about 35, mostly developed, countries (the highest number in the history of the youth delegate programme) included youth in their delegations to United Nations meetings. However, aside from the youth members of State delegations, many young people had taken concrete action to make their voices heard at the international level, including representatives of youth organizations, young human rights defenders and unpaid United Nations interns. All those efforts combined were now paving the way for the enhanced participation of youth in the United Nations. Mr. Kauschanski made a plea to all participants to continue their engagement to empower the young generations to take an active role in decision-making.

65. Ms. Muyambo discussed the role of youth in the work and activities of the Human Rights Council and her experience with the organization of the youth forum at the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as of the first youth forum held in connection with the Council, prior to its thirty-second session. Ms. Muyambo welcomed the adoption by the Council of resolution 28/14 establishing the Forum and congratulated the Permanent Mission of Romania to the United Nations Office at Geneva and the core group for having created a space for young people. She shared lessons learned from the youth forum of the Human Rights Council, and stressed the need to educate youth about the mandate of the Council and to provide clearer guidance on how young people could participate and engage meaningfully with its work, including the universal periodic review. Ms. Muyambo raised the issue of how to ensure that discussions held in the Forum would have an impact at the local level, particularly among the most marginalized youth, including young women. She noted the high level of frustration among young people, who already felt distant from policymaking at the local level, and how such frustration was amplified vis-à-vis the work of the Council, which was perceived as being even further away from their reality.

66. Participants discussed whether an international legally binding human rights instrument for youth rights would strengthen the protection and promotion of those rights.

Reference was made to the regional experiences in Latin America and Africa and to the Ibero-American Convention and the African Youth Charter, and to the potential benefits of a youth-specific binding instrument provided that such an instrument comprehensively addressed the fast-evolving challenges and needs of today's young generation.

67. The possibility of establishing new mechanisms to strengthen the protection of the rights of youth at the international level was also discussed. Participants referred to the possibility of creating a dedicated new special procedure of the Human Rights Council. Reference was also made to a possible joint general comment on the rights of youth to be adopted by human rights treaty bodies. Participants were of the view that, aside from any new mandate, mechanism or instrument, more efforts should be deployed to make better use of existing human rights monitoring mechanisms, including by mainstreaming youth rights in the work of those mechanisms and by strengthening the implementation of States' human rights obligations at the national level. It was also suggested that the Council should consider requesting the submission of a report containing an in-depth analysis of the obstacles faced by young people in the exercise of their human rights. It was also recommended that guidance be developed for States regarding the adoption and implementation of rights-based approaches to national youth policies.

68. Participants acknowledged that the United Nations had made good progress in making youth rights visible across the system, including through the creation of the mandate of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General on Youth and the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2250 (2015). Nevertheless, much more needed to be done, for instance, with regard to the establishment of a youth delegate programme in all countries and the systematic inclusion of youth delegates in States' delegations to the various United Nations organs and bodies. That would be particularly important for engaging and obtaining the support of older generations of decision makers in ensuring that youth rights were a priority in the United Nations system, as "youth speaking to youth" would not be likely to change anything. Participants agreed that the Human Rights Council should offer more channels and entry points for the voices of youth, particularly in the light of its mandate as the main body responsible for the global promotion and protection of human rights. In that context, participants welcomed the panel on youth and human rights that had been held during the thirty-third session of the Council.

B. Recommendations

69. **International and regional intergovernmental organizations should ensure that their member States' legal and policy frameworks guarantee the effective promotion and protection of the human rights of youth, including the inclusive, full and effective participation of youth in decision-making.**

70. **States should guarantee the right of young people, individually and in association with others, to unhindered access to, and communication with, international bodies, in particular the United Nations, its representatives and human rights mechanisms. They should create the conditions to support the participation of young people in regional and international forums and, in particular, their engagement with regional and international human rights mechanisms. This should include the removal of barriers to their meaningful participation, such as undue restrictions placed on the sources of funding of youth associations and overly restrictive legislation on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and freedom of movement.**

71. **States should consider creating mechanisms to ensure effective and meaningful participation of youth in the work of the Human Rights Council, including through youth consultative mechanisms and the participation of youth in relevant discussions,**

including as expert members of panels. States should include or increase youth representation within their delegations to all relevant regional and international forums, notably the Council. Youth activists should consider assisting States in this effort, including by advocating for the creation in their country of a youth delegates programme with adequate financial resources.

72. **Civil society organizations, in their respective areas of expertise, should more consistently draw attention to issues related to the human rights of youth, including when interacting with United Nations human rights mechanisms. They should also include or increase participation of young people in their delegations to regional and international human rights forums and facilitate their engagement with regional and international human rights mechanisms.**

73. **States and civil society organizations should invest in education, training and awareness-raising initiatives at the local level to raise awareness among young people with regard to regional and international human rights instruments and mechanisms, including individual communication procedures.**

74. **In the context of the universal periodic review, Governments and civil society organizations should regularly submit information and make recommendations about youth rights. Youth-related recommendations should be widely disseminated by Governments and civil society organizations in order to ensure adequate follow-up.**

VII. Concluding remarks

75. In their concluding remarks, both Co-Chairs expressed their appreciation to all participants for their engagement and commitment, and thanked all panellists and moderators for their excellent contributions and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the organization of the Forum.

76. Mr. Mukashev summarized the main issues that had been discussed over the two days of the Forum and recalled the importance of combating discrimination, the need for the empowerment of youth and the importance of education to ensure more meaningful participation of young people. He expressed his satisfaction at the large number of participants and encouraged youth delegates to attend the next session of the Human Rights Council in March 2017, when the report of the Forum would be presented. He concluded by saying that, beyond the challenges faced by youth, the inspiration and hope that had permeated the first session of the Forum gave him solid ground for believing that the inspiration it had generated would be manifested in a world where youth voices were heard and taken into account. He invited all participants to remember the importance of listening to young people. All measures taken to implement the recommendations of the Forum should be developed, implemented, monitored and assessed in consultation with, and with the participation of, young people, including young women and girls.

77. Mr. Alhendawi said that the Forum represented an important landmark for advancing the youth human rights agenda. He stressed that Governments and nations should remain united around the common objective of advancing human rights for all, and should not fail the largest young generation in history. He expressed the hope that democracy and the rule of law would continue to benefit from the talent, enthusiasm and contributions of young people. He mentioned the "Not Too Young to Run" campaign launched by his Office together with partner organizations with the aim of raising awareness on the challenges young people faced in running for elected office. While recognizing that the challenges to youth participation remained enormous, Mr. Alhendawi was confident that progress was possible, with the support of the United Nations and others.

He also expressed the hope that the Human Rights Council would continue to pay attention to the question of youth participation and youth rights.